

PUGSLEY'S KNIGHTLY ADVENTURES



KAIL THOMAS

Pugsley's Knightly Adventures
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Summary: Kail's beloved stuffed dog Pugsley comes to life with friends and foes to interact with squirrels and neighborhoodlums cats warring outside their window. Book One is seasoned with historical references and sprinkled with amusing characters.



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KAIL THOMAS



PUGSLEY'S KNIGHTLY ADVENTURES

Imagined and created by
Kail Thomas & his Dad

Gently edited by
Renee Fisher
WildSage Publishing

PREPARE TO BE...



ENTERTAINED!!!



Ladies and Lords
Because of his bravery, courage and chivalry

Knight Pugsley, The First

Is now proclaimed by royal decree
To be an official Kingdom Knight

Signed by: The Queen

PROLOGUE

1919



It was the late Victorian Age when Pugsley's Royal lineage began. The Queen's Royal Victorian Order gave her the power to grant knighthoods to members of the royal family by just signing her autograph. This included pets, if she so desired.

Royal service had been a pug family tradition throughout history. As the family tree grew, his relatives tended to affiliate themselves with branches of the government and the military.

After the “War to End All Wars,” antiwar rhetoric and sentiment were high in 1919, and the anger in England was very transparent. The loss of autonomy by weak nations in the world and tensions in Eastern Europe would eventually produce another conflict in the not so distant future.

The notions of armored knights mounted upon noble steeds had died out in the fifteenth century, but horses in the early 20th century still provided soldiers the fastest way to get from point A to point B. One of Pugsley’s ancestral uncles had accompanied a mounted infantry unit in a custom made saddle bag.

The steam-powered motor car was produced during this period and roadways started to transform to accommodate this new mode of transportation, but most of the Royal Family still preferred to travel by the much more

comfortable horse-drawn carriage. When they did, Pug's kin were in their laps.

Railroads were still the only viable way to transfer large quantities of supplies for war efforts, and Pugsley's (Great \times 4) grandfather was one of the first to see an artillery piece mounted to an armored train. Pugsley also had an aunt who sat in a lab alongside a scientist who was developing antidotes and medicines to help wounded soldiers.

Being able to transmit information securely over the telephone was not an option back in those days. A great many of the pooch's heroic ancestors were used as spies. They were relied upon to relay valuable information because Pugs didn't talk.

Being an autonomous entity was never crucial to Pugsley's bloodline. Serving as faithful furry

companions, bound by truth and accountability is how they lived their lives.

Before the abdication of the throne, Prince Edward VIII and his entourage, including some of Pugsley's kin, made many trips "across the pond" to spend time with Wallis Simpson. She was an American socialite who Edward would give up being the King of England to marry.



DREAMING



As Pugsley slept atop his pedestal placed devotedly beside Kail's bed, he dreamed heroic tales of those knightly canines that were his ancestors. He wanted to be worthy of the link he had to that noble brotherhood. Some of the princely pooches in his dreams met challenges astride noble steeds. While the other, not so gallant mongrels, used donkeys for their conveyance.

A few kindred spirits moved through kingdoms in his mind on grand carriages. Motley mutts driving these wagging wagons traded waves to passersby.

Pug's favorite mental movies were complete with dramatic musical scores that ebbed and flowed with the cerebral celebration. Marching bands led the glorious parades between the walls of cheering tail-waggers.

The challenges of everyday life sometimes brought to light his insecurities. After a day of self-doubt or uncertainty about his place in the world, his bedtime mind molds would reflect a darker mirror mood, accompanied by murkier music.

When he had inky dreams, there appeared a recurring character. It was a sad peasant pup that hiked through muddy hills while it torrentially rained. No one seemed to care for

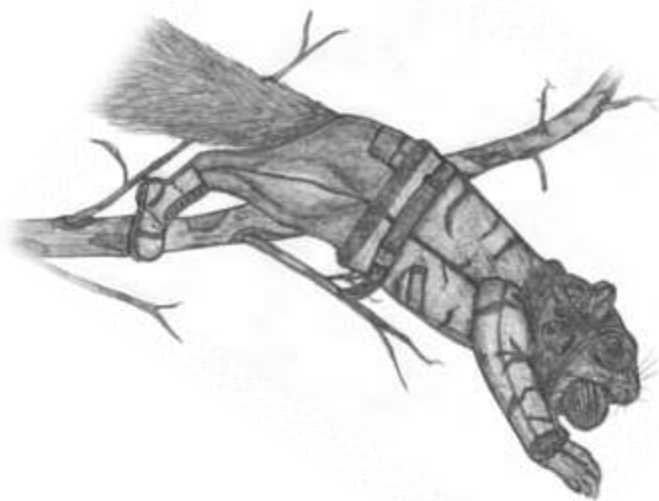
this pitiful rogue, although it was quite clear, he was feeling downtrodden.

To survive, this barking beggar traded small, intricately carved bones for scraps of food.

The ill-favored traveler had dreams of his own. He wanted to escape his perpetual cycle of poverty. From a foggy shore, he watched boats sailing to distant lands. He would have visions of meat cooking above an open fire and stacks of dog treats.

Suddenly, Pugsley was startled awake by a loud *SLUMPT*. With a grumbling belly, he lay there listening.





2

JERRY “THE GREAT!”



ugsley lay motionless, dissolved in his blanket like a sniper would do to avoid detection. At his flattest, he stopped breathing. It was cricket quiet. Then....a *FLUMPT*, a thu...thumpy tone, unlike a tinny bang or crash. It was a numby, clumpy noise?

What's the word, what's the word, I hate it when that happens? He grouched to himself.

He was clawing in his word bank for the perfect onomatopoeia like a dog sniffing for a buried bone. Then he heard the sound again.

Was it Red Monkey's subwoofer kicking out a beat on the other end of the apartment? Pugs considered.

The plushy monkey in question was a long-time resident that was obsessed with making beats. The sound Pugs heard was not rhythmic though.

Although Pugsley was a stuffed animal, he had all the innate canine senses. The fight or flight adrenaline surge made ringing in his ears. He then felt a presence in the room. He was about to call out in fear when he heard...

“Mornin’ buddy. Sorry, I woke you. I’m just grabbing my library book.” It was Kail.

“Did you hear a bang?” Pugs said tensely.

“A bang, like a gunshot?” questioned Kail.

“No more like something fell,” replied the poochy pug.

“I didn’t hear anything bro. Maybe you were dreaming. Go on back to sleep, I’ll see you later. Everything’s fine little buddy.” Kail said reassuringly and quietly left the room.

Pugsley heard Kail and his dad leave out the front door and lock the deadbolt. He knew they were heading to school, so it must be 8:25 a.m. As his eyelids began to droop, the pooped pug drifted drift back to la-la land.

He was startled awake again, but this time it was a PLU..*PLUMPF* accompanied by teeny

footsteps on the roof above. He sat up in bed and looked out the window. On the corner of the roof that jutted out from the apartment building appeared a squirrel dressed in what looked like a WW2 pilot outfit, wait was he still asleep?

Pugsley frowned as the squirrel turned and shook his bushy behind at the annoyed pup.

He sat up in bed and barked at the intruder, “Get off!”

The squirrel didn’t move. He just sat on the edge of the roof twitching his tail.

Pugs bound from his bed onto the desk chair, then up on the desk and stepped over to the windowsill.

He opened the window a few inches and yelled, “What do you think you’re doing up there!”

“It’s the safest way to travel.” said the squirrel.

“What...safest?” frowned the peeved pug.

“Yeah, safer, you know, like a less dangerous way to go, Fido,” replied the squirrel.

“What! My name is not Fido...uh...tree rat!” countered Pugs as he tried to shake off his morning mind fog.

“Oh, excuse me, it must be Bowser then, huh?” the squirrel responded with a grin. “All you flat-faces are named Bowser.”

“The name’s Pugsley, not that it’s any of your business.

“Ugsley. That’s a terrible name to give a critter kid.”

“You heard me Lamebrain or are you deaf?” growled Pugs. “Do *you* even have a name, rodent?”

“Well yes I do, it’s Jeremiah, thank you for asking, but you can call me Jerry the Great!” Jerry declared.

“I’m not calling you....” the pug tried to spit out a witty comeback but was cut off.

“You’re the saggiest cat I’ve ever seen,” cracked Jerry.

“I’m not a cat, you bonehead,” the pug defended.

Jerry frowned, “You’re not very hip or quick on the uptake are you, Skippy?”

Pugs wrinkled his already crumpled brow.

Jerry waited for a comparable comeback, “Really, you don’t got nothing? Well, I’m the quickest witted critter around these parts, much quicker than you cats!”

“I’m not a cat! I’m a Pug!” yelled Pugs.

“That’s the first time I ever heard a cat say he was a punk,” smirked Jerry.

“NOT PUNK, PUG!!!” screamed Pugsley.

Jerry then jumped off the edge of the roof onto the closest tree branch and looked back at Pugsley and said, “It’s been enlightening to say the least. You have helped reinforce some of my *dogmatic* beliefs, but I gotta jet. See ya, Bowwow!”

Jerry jumped down to another branch, “You need to *bone* up on your ribbing. Get it, *bone* up? Probably not. Anyhoo, see you.”

The squirrel darted down the tree without waiting for a response.

“Not if I see you first, Jerry the Jerk!” shouted Pugs after him.

This guy is going to be a real pain in the neck, the now annoyed pup thought.



3

ASLEEP ON THE JOB



ugs did not get much sleep that day on account of Jerry jumping back-and-forth from the tree to the roof, for what purpose the groggy pup had not a clue. He tried to erase the earlier events from his mind, but he could not shake them from his irritated brain.

He was about to nod off when he heard a light tapping on the window. Pugsley fired a glance at the glass, expecting to see Jerry Kookyberry, but the view was vacant of anything, including the annoying squirrel.

Might as well not complain about it, he muttered. Maybe I'll have Kail's dad call an exterminator.

He grinned to himself under the blanket.

No, that would be mean. It's just an apartment. We don't own the building. Who is in charge of roof traffic anyway? He wondered.

Pugs had seen crows, robins and other birds on the roof plenty of times. But they had never intentionally bothered him.

Self-talk helped keep his attitude in check, but he seemed to be doing too much internal gray-matter-chatter lately. He was going to have to

deal with the squirrely situation at some point soon. Pugs need their sleep.

As the end of the day approached, Pugsley's corkscrew tail had a lot less coil to it. He was *not* looking forward to his security shift. If he could get Big Bear to relieve him during the night, he could sneak in a power nap.

Big Bear was Pugsley's daytime counterpart. The plump cantankerous beast wore a red Russian Ushanka and proudly perched himself at the highest point in the apartment.

The vaulted ceiling in the living room allowed Kail's dad to construct a wooden military-style training structure to help build upper body strength. It included a climbing rope, pull-up bar, and trapeze with gymnast rings.

It also had an area for storage, which is where the bear centered himself. The bulky brown

bear could survey the whole quadrant from this vantage point and would usually sleep during the night.

Big Bear was a committed soldier and stickler for duty. He taught Pugsley about security standards and how to serve with honor. During Pug's basic training period, he had to learn the Army's eleven general orders and recite them word for word while standing at attention.

Of course, the first general order was, "I will guard everything within the limits of my post and quit my post only when properly relieved," he mouthed the words under his breath while he dragged himself out of his bed to prepare for his night shift.

Pugsley thought if he explained the situation, the grumpy guard might cut him some slack, but bears liked their sleep as much *or more* than dogs do.

As Pugs began trudging his usual trail through the rooms that night, he noticed that Kail's dad had put the sleeping bag and pillow on the wrestling mat in front of the living room television. Kail liked to hound lounge that way sometimes while watching TV.

It was tempting to lie down on the soft sack for just a minute. Instead, he continued his security lap around the apartment. Pugs kept looking up at the bear on each round. It would be a mistake to wake Big Bear too soon into the shift before he asked for a break.

As he made another pass by the pillow and the inviting nap sack, he heard Big Bear start to snore.

Pugsley thought, *"Maybe I'll just sit for a second, no harm in that."*

He sat down on the cushy sleeping bag and leaned back on the fluffy pillow. He positioned himself to watch Big Bear who bobbed his head up and down like a sleepy sailor in the crow's nest of a ship.

He felt kind of disloyal, but all was quiet, and the pillow felt so good. He wondered if Big Bear would take some sort of payment to give him just a few minutes of shut-eye. As his eyelids began to close, Pugsley was soon dead to the world.





DEMOTED



ugsley woke with a bit of jerk and a Jerk, literally. The latter “Jerk” referred to the fuzzy-faced walnut hoarder rapping on his window.

The morning sky fit Pug’s mood; dreary. He suddenly realized that he was in his bed under his blanket, although he was not aware of how he got there.

He sat up in bed like a stepped on garden rake. He knew that he had fallen asleep in the living room on the sleeping bag or... *did he dream that?*

Jerry repeated the same number of knocks on the window with his fuzzy knucks.

Is he tapping Morse code? Pugs muttered. The pup tilted his head slowly back-and-forth from side to side trying to figure out what Jerry was doing.

He's gone bonkers, the pup figured.

Jerry was mouthing something too, but Pugs could not understand what he was saying. *Is he singing?*

Pugsley mimicked the squirrels slow mouth movements like he was mouth mirroring a song, "Hardware...nightmare...software?"

“That squirrel is nuts.” He said with a groggy giggle, “*Nuts* is the right word.”

He motioned to Jerry holding up his fuzzy finger, “Just a minute,” he said aloud.

Pugsley’s normal steps to the window sill were different this morning. The office chair was moved away from the desk. The sleepy pup slowly rolled the chair to its regular spot.

He pulled himself up onto his pedestal bed and halfheartedly hopped towards the seat of the chair and would have stuck the landing too if the chair was not yanked out from under him. He crashed in roly-poly fashion under the desk.

Pugsley looked up befuddled. Despair hit his heart as Big Bear stepped out from behind the chair.

“I believe what Squirrely there was trying to tell you is beware or maybe....prepare.” The

bear said in his deep morning voice. “On both accounts, he would be correct.”

Big Bear cleared his throat, pushed out his chest and stated, “Pugsley, you are now on record for dereliction of duty.”

The bearer of bad news had his notebook open and pointed to an entry on a page.

Pugsley hung his head to avoid the massive mammal’s glaring stare, “I’m sorry Big Bear, I meant just to rest my eyes.....”

The bear held up his paw and said, “Stop. I don’t want to hear any excuses.”

“I was going to ask...” Pugs sputtered.

“Private Pugsley,” Big Bear interrupted. “I cannot ignore this offense. You will have to face the consequences of your actions.”

“How severe of punishment am I getting?”

Big Bear was hesitant to speak. He just kept looking down at the cowering pup.

He then stated, “Pugsley, I am sorry to say that you are being relieved of your duty. I am very disappointed. I did expect a lot more from you soldier.”

Pug’s eyes rolled up towards his commander, but his head did not move.

He was barely able to push the panicked air over his vocal cords as he stuttered, “You mean, I mean...uh...you mean...I’m...out? Like I am fired, not on patrol anymore?”

“That is correct,” replied the bear. “You are being held accountable for your actions.”

A long pause increased the tension in the air.

“If you are so weary that you cannot fulfill your duties, then Owley is going to take your

place on night-shift. He has shown interest in the position since he arrived.”

“But...but he has only been here a couple of weeks!” said Pugsley in a pleading voice.

“I know you have endeared yourself to Kail, but I spoke to him this morning. He agrees that we should give Owley a chance. I have written your offense in my duty diary. Kail said to let you get some rest, and he will talk to you when he gets home.”

Big Bear stiffened his chin up, then executed a perfect military about-face and left the bedroom.

The bear stuck his big head back in the room long enough to say, “If the pest outside the window is keeping you from getting good sack time, you should do something about it.”

Pugs came from under the desk and scowled up towards the window, but Jerry was gone. The Pug sat slumped with his head hanging. He forgot to ask how he had ended up back in his bed.



STEAMED



ugsley felt like he had gotten punched in the gut. His posture and spirit were as gravely drained as a vampire victim. Desperate thoughts bits of time portals and turning clocks back to when he decided to lie down on the beckoning sleeping bag paralyzed his body. He just sat and stared at the doorway through which Big Bear had exited.

He was hoping the Russian Mishka (Russian for bear) would pop his head back in and say, “Ha-ha....gotcha!” No such luck. What would his future be in the apartment without a job, a purpose?

A hollow pecking sound broke him out of his trance. At first, he thought it was Jerry, and the last thing he needed was more irritation. Again, *pock. pock. pock*, but it was not coming from the window glass.

It sounded like it was coming from outside on the wall, kitty-corner from the window.

“What the heck,” Pugs mumbled.

He moved the office chair back into position and ascended to his usual spot and stood sideways on the window sill.

Pugsley couldn’t quite see what was causing the rapid rapping. For him to get a better look-

see, he had to squish his left cheek against the glass; *his fore-cheek, not his rear-cheek*. When he spied the composer of the pitter-patter, he couldn't believe his eyes.

Clinging to the side of the apartment building was a Red-naped Sapsucker wearing what looked like a leather mask.

Pugsley knew it was a Sapsucker too. Kail always held the pup under his arm when reading and he had just finished a book about Idaho's birds. The Red-naped Sapsucker, which is a woodpecker, was one of Kail's favorite types.

Pug's, sliding the window open, startled the bird. It lickety-splitted to the tree next to the building.

He blared at the bird, "Hey, Tree Chicken, why are you pecking on our wall?!"

“Well, goody mornin’ to you too, Fuzzy Flipper! You gave me quite a quake.” replied the Sapsucker in a high-pitched cackley screech. “Who swiped the syrup off your pancake, fruitcake?”

“Who you callin’ a fruitcake, Sapsucker?!” Pugsley batted back.

“Darn tootin’ I’m a Sapsucker! I’m the prime woodpecky in these parts, Soggy Lips,” served up the bird, “I can go all day word-warring like this if you want to, Twisted Rudder!”

Pugsley quickly tired of the exchange. “All right, enough,” conceded the pug. What are you doing pecking on our wall? It’s vinyl, not wood, and it’s annoying me.”

“Well let me tell ya, Drippy Drooler. We, of the tap-happy kind, aren’t too particular what we jab our saber at,” yakked the feathered foe.

“Explore every unopened door is a good motto, Hairy Hermit.”

“Where do you come up with this stuff and what’s with the mask?” Pugs quizzed.

“Well, I’ve got a few allergies and kind of a weaky beaky, Mr. Nosey Posey,” defended the woodpecker. “Do you ever get out of your cage much, Puggle Diddy?”

“What do you mean now? I’m not in a cage,” defended the pug.

“Do ya ever desire to battle your boredom, restore your spirit and inspire your inner animal to the wilds of your....well,” the bird looked towards the ground. “For you, it’s the front grass?” teased the Sapsucker.

“I’ve had a rough morning, could you please just stop hammering on the wall or any other....”

The batty bird interrupted, “What’s your name anyway, squirt?”

“Pugsley,” answered the deflated pug.

“Maybe when you mature a bitty bit, we can go on a little quest together, fly the coop, break the chain....”

“Okay, okay I get it, just stop,” pleaded Pugs.

“So you’ll do it then, Prince Pugsley?” urged the sappy woodpecker.

“Oh yeah, sure. Whatever.”

“When?” said the head bobbing bird.

“I don’t know...soon maybe.” Pugs replied.

“Soon maybe when?” volleyed Sappy.

“Soon, sometime. I just got a lot of free time on my hands.”

“No, no, not hands. Paw-paws for yoo-hoo,” goaded the bird with a grin.

The bird bounced to another thin branch and snatched a bug in its beak and gulped it down.

“I’m gonna hold you to your wordy, Sir Pugsley. See you... sometime, soon...maybe!”

The bird hopped to another branch, “My friends call me Sappy. You can too if you wanna, Pugster!” the Sapsucker shouted back as he shot away.



GETTING ALONG



ugsley sat somberly on the sill
gazing in the direction the sap-
guzzler flew. The bitty sparkles
that reflected off the last fall leaves reminded
the pup of tiny flashlights.

“Now I have two irritants to contend with,”
Pugs gritted to himself, “That screwy squirrel
and now this phrased-crazed woodpecker; a real
psycho surplus.”

His thoughts drifted back to Big Bear and his demotion. He ached to have his old job again. At times he thought it a burden to perform, but now he yearned for the daily ritual. Adding insult to injury, he lost it to a recent resident.

“Pugsley,” a buttery toned voice drifted in from the next room.

“Speak of the devil. Right on cue, Feather Face.” Pugs said under his breath.

Pugs knew it was Owley, but he had no desire to engage in conversation with the traitorous Turkey-Burger who had just stolen his post.

“Oh, Pugsley,” cooed the owl.

If I open the window, I wonder if he would fly out. The pup thought to himself.

He knew that a bad attitude and a lack of cooperation with the so-called “changing of the

guard” would be fiercely frowned upon by the “O.I.C.”(Officer in Charge). The O.I.C, or more specifically, the “B.I.C” (Bear in Charge) would certainly document his attitude as yet another infraction.

Reluctantly, the punished pug retreated from the sill and plodded to the next room. The owl was sitting on the dining room window sill.

Owley’s feathered fingers fanned the reluctant pug forward. Without saying a word, the Bird Bottom used the Army’s tactical hand signal for “*See/Watch/Look.*” He then used the signal to “*Go here or move up*” and pointed his pompom plume. Pugsley did have to admit the signals were executed well.

The owl pointed towards something in the parking lot below their second story window.

The pup annoyingly whispered, “What is it, you know I can’t just *jump* up there.”

Owley pivoted his head entirely around without even slightly moving his robotic body he asked calmly, “Have you ever seen a gray cat wearing a Fedora?”

“Fedora, like the hat Fedora?” replied the puzzled pug.

“Yes, like the hat,” stared the Owl motionless.

“Who-o-o....puts a hat on their cat,” jested Pugs. “It sounds like we’ve got ourselves quite a circus of neighbors. All we need now are an elephant and a giraffe.”

“What are you talking about Pugsley?” the owl asked calmly.

“Well, we have had a nutty squirrel show up, and, I just met a loony-tune woodpecker. Now

you're telling me we have The Great Catsby parading around down there!" gushed the pug.

"Calm down Puglet," Owley said steadily.

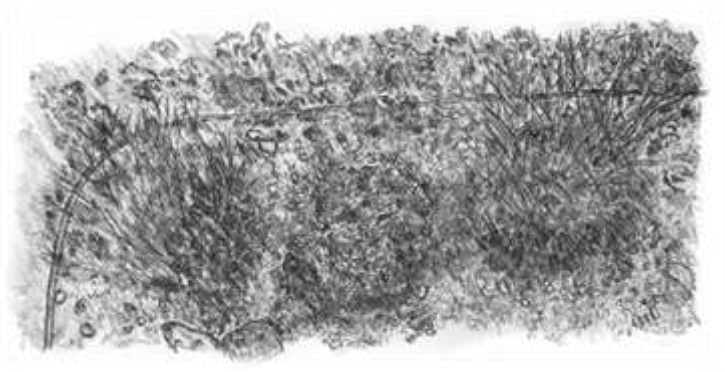
"Oh, now you are going to start giving me a hard time!" bitter barked Pugs.

"Pugsley, ratchet down there soldier!" Big Bear commanded from his high post. "Listen. Remember you have two ears and one mouth. Do twice as much listening as you do talking and you may learn something."

At this, Pugsley deflated. Owley continued his stare as Pugsley cowered avoiding the glare of the higher ground rival. He felt like a vulnerable target waiting for the inevitable blast of an enemy's bomb.

Why couldn't Kail have brought home a helpless gerbil instead of this intimidating owl?" he thought to himself.

“Now that you have composed yourself, stack a couple of Kail’s toy boxes and join me up here so we can get a better look at this suspicious looking feline,” soothingly said the owl.



Can YOU see the cat?

MR. MEOWZERS



ugsley reluctantly roosted next to the job-stealing raptor. He had resigned himself to respecting the authority of the higher ranking member, just for now.

He still considered Owley a visitor, although this new development more than likely secured this apartment as Owley's permanent residence.

Sounding like the low note melody from a harmonica, the owl exhaled, “We see you-u-u Sneaky Pete.”

I don’t know what this “we” stuff is, mused Pugs to himself, unless he has a mouse in his pocket.

As much as Pugsley didn’t want to admit it, Big Bear choosing an owl as a night watchman was a pretty solid tactical decision. His eyesight alone made him a good choice, although Pugs would never admit it to the Fluffyhead.

“I thought your tribe was only lunar,” grumped the pup.

“What type of neighbor are you, Wicked Whiskers?” continued the owl, ignoring the pug’s comment. “I bet a dollar to donuts this

mouse shopper is up to no good. Do you see he doesn't even have a collar? Feral, I'm betting."

Pugsley did not want to let Owley know that he had not even spotted the prowler yet.

"Uh-huh, yeah." Pugs responded, attempting to sound convincing.

He tried not to rotate his neck to look in the direction of the motionless bird. Even though the Pug was straining his bulgy blinkers back and forth from the owl to the ground below, he still could not see the darn cat.

"Okay, Mr. Meowzers, what are you-u-u... sta-a-alking s-o-o very slo-o-owly?" oozed the owl. "Oooh... I... see now."

Now Pugsley was forced to take a quick look towards the owl. "What.... what is it?"

Owley noticeable tensed his body, but did not change his position. “You don’t see him do you, runt?”

Pugsley did not respond. He deflated next to the bird as he waited for the next stabbing syllables. He knew that they were going to blister his ears with disapproval. The pup closed his eyes waiting for the blow, but it did not come. Instead, he felt the owl’s wing close around his shoulder.

“It’s okay, relax. I’m not an enemy, my fuzzy friend. That feline down there just might be though. Let’s work together on this.”

Pugsley looked up into the owl’s enormous eyes, stunned speechless. He couldn’t believe the no-nonsense sentry just spoke the kind words.

“You can catch more rats with sugar than you can with daggers,” soothed the owl. “Also, I believe a donor of knowledge gains more than a tyrannical tutor. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“Uh, yeah, I would...definitely. Thank you.” Pugsley replied meekly.

He didn’t know if the owl was sincere or not. If this gesture wasn’t genuine, the owl sure faked sincerity well.



THE TALK



ugsley was not looking forward to his “visit” with Kail. He hated the fact that he had disappointed

Big Bear and he knew that Kail was going to feel the same way. As he stared at the digital alarm clock by his bed, the numbers advanced at a snail’s pace.

“How in the heck did get yourself in this jam?” He scolded himself quietly. “You will be needing a big shovel to dig yourself out of this hole.”

His internal monologue generator kept shooting out thoughts like a scatter gun. The gray matter chatter kept his already busy brain in chaos with no logical or helpful order to the incessant flow.

The longer he obsessed about the situation, the more he dreaded the vibrations from Kail’s footfalls as he climbed the stairs to the second floor apartment after school.

Pugsley’s throat became so parched that it felt like he was swallowing gravel. *This is what a camel must feel like after they have depleted their humps in the Sahara Desert*, thought Pugsley. *(How does a stuffed animal quench its thirst?)*

He was in mid-thought about whether he would wear sandals in the Sahara when he heard the trudging tremors of Kail's ascent up the stairs and then... (*Dramatic sound effect-♪ Dun-Dun-Duuun ♪!*) The door opened.

"I'm...hooome...everybody!" Kail cheerfully announced as he entered.

In his head Pugs heard, "*Retreat!*" and disappeared further under his blanket. He listened as Kail came towards the bedroom. The pup did not have a freckle of a chance avoiding what was to come. He had to just buckle down and face his fate. Slowly he emerged from under his protective covering.

Kail sat down on the edge of the bed next to Pugs and looked down at the saggy sack of pup.

“I know you feel bad about falling asleep, but soldiers make mistakes. Everyone makes them. So, no big deal, okay?”

Kail paused and looked out the bedroom door. “You probably think Owley is a rival, huh? He’s not really. He’s not an enemy; he’s an ally and a great addition to our security team. Who better than an owl to watch over us when it’s dark? You know the whole seeing in the dark thing?”

Pugs didn’t respond; he just hung his head and listened.

“I don’t care at all about you falling asleep, bro.”

The pug looked up now.

“That’s right dude. No harm, no foul.”

At that, Kail picked Pugsley up and hugged him. “Besides, I’d rather have you next to me at night.”

The pup buried his face in Kail’s chest. The fatal blow that he thought would come was all in his mind. He should have known better. Relief warmed him like a blanket fresh out of the dryer.

Kail asked, “Pugs, I was hoping you could help me with some school stuff. I want to try a homework option our class has been given.”

“Anything for you, you know that, Kail.” Pugsley replied with a tonguey grin. The metamorphosis of his spirit immediately flipped from sad sack to Happy Jack.

“You know those dramatic dreams you always tell me about, with the knights and stuff?” Kail said enthusiastically.

Pugs said, “Yeah, I still have those.”

“Well, I thought if you could write down details, we could use them to write songs.

“Songs?” puzzled the Pug.

“Yeah, one of my weekly word-use choices is to write a song or a rap. I thought we could get Red Monkey to help us do some beats and we could write the words. I could use the music for my game-play videos.

“I can write down the dreams, but I don’t know how to write songs.” The pup said reluctantly.

“I don’t either, but Dad knows. He said he would help. He thought it was a good idea when he saw that option on my spelling contract. He said since I had to do homework anyway; I might as well create some copyrights and make use of the effort.” Kail replied.

“What type of songs, like battle music?” Pugs asked.

“Exactly, rocking battle songs! The kind you hear behind video games.” Kail said excitedly.



RED MONKEY



ugsley was awakened the next morning by a velvet-red stuffed monkey patting him gently on the head.

“I was told we are going to co-write some songs together. I like to create early in the day when my mind is fresh. Then do the mix-down later on.” Red Monkey said smoothly.

Pugs did not know Red Monkey that well. Pugsley was always asleep when Red Monkey was making music with his friends behind the closed door of Dad's bedroom.

Because they had a noise curfew in their apartment building, Pugs rarely heard or spoke to any characters going in and out of the bedroom on the other side of the apartment.

At night, when the pup did his nighttime patrol, he would see Red Monkey crashed on Dad's bed. Whoever he was making music with that day was on or around the perimeter asleep like ragged roadies backstage after a rock concert.

“Come on bro, let's get started. You got some lyrics right?” the monkey asked as he turned to leave the room.

“Well, not right now. I mean, I have some ideas.” The pooch sputtered.

“That’ll do, come on.” Red Monkey walked out without turning around.

Pugs’ new task was: tunesmith. He looked over at the clock as he got out of bed. It read 9:30 a.m. The mountain of stress that had left his body helped him sleep soundly and long.

He trailed Red Monkey to Dad’s bedroom where there was a mobile computer workstation setup as well as a microphone and music stand.

Pugs was totally out of his element. He bashfully asked, “What do I do?”

“Okay, first just tell me about one of your dreams.” Monkey replied.

“Any dream?” asked the pup.

“No, not any dream. Kail said he wanted some battle music, right? So, a battle dream with as much detail as possible. We will write down the details and start from there.”

“Oh, okay...uh...well.” Pugsley was afraid he was going to say something dumb and have Red Monkey laugh at him.

“Okay, listen.” Red Monkey reassuringly said. “Do this. Quit worrying and just give me one word that describes the feeling you have about one of the dreams that you have had. Doom, frenzy, confusion...anything.”

“Frightening.” Pugs spat out. “Does that work?”

“There you go. So listen to this and see if it sounds frightening.” Red Monkey made a few mouse clicks while staring at his laptop and

then touched a black key on a tiny keyboard next to it.

The sound felt like ghostly jellyfish tendrils pulsing inside his dog ears. “Whoa, that gives me shivers.”

“How about this.” Red Monkey made another few mouse clicks, and gently finger rolled over several white keys.

Those notes felt like a satin ribbon whisper breathed into his ear. “That’s amazing, Monkey.”

“Does it feel like the dream you are thinking of?”

“I don’t know,” the confused Pug answered.

“Which sounds do you like the best?”

“The second one for sure,” replied Pugsley.

“But does it capture the ‘Frightening’ feeling from the dream you had?” Red Monkey pried.

“Well, no. The first one was certainly creepier.” Pugs admitted.

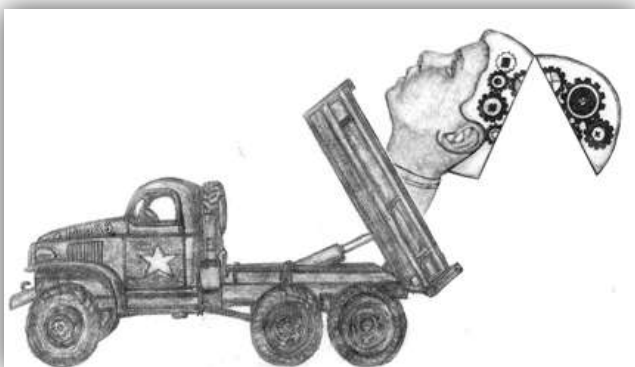
“Okay, good. Now, I want you to close your eyes and tell me details in single words or phrases. Nothing common like ‘The dude held a sword.’ If there is a weapon like a sword, has it been used in battle or is it ornamental? Is it heavy or light? Is it curved or straight, long or short? Stuff like that.”

“Alright.” said Pugs.

“Also, what are the specific circumstances surrounding the events? Not just night or day, sunny or stormy, winter or summer. Details, details, details, okay?”

“Got it, I think.” said the pup hesitantly.

“Cool, let’s begin.” Said Red Monkey



BRAIN-DUMP



Now filled with music, Pugsley bopped out of the bedroom beatboxing and began to air-drum wildly. The pounding pup looked back through the doorway and said, “See ya, bro.”

The Red Monkey chuckled from inside the room, “Have had a good day, brother. We got a good start to something. Bring me more details, details, details.”

Pugs stopped right below Big Bear, who was dutifully awake on his high post. “Did you hear us in there?”

“Sounded very good from what I could hear, Pugs.” the bear replied.

The proud pup glanced over his shoulder at Owley. He knew that owls could sleep with one eye open, but this morning both eyes were closed. He would have loved to trumpet his accomplishment to the sleeping birdbrain.

He looked back up at the Medved (Russian for bear) and noticed he had a blanket wrapped around him. “You should join us sometime and sing or something.”

“Red Monkey has asked me that before. I don’t know, maybe, sometime. Definitely not this morning though.” The bear rasped in his thick Russian accent.

“Are you ill?” asked the concerned pup.

“I’ll be alright, went past my limit, again.”
Big Bear slowly responded.

“Chocolate?” quizzed Pugs.

“Yes, chocolate, the brown beast.” The bear rubbed his aching belly.

Pugs looked back towards Owley to see if he was listening. The owl’s eyes were now open and staring towards the boasting pup.

“Big Bear, you know we’re not supposed to eat...”

“The bear cut Pugsley off and glared down at him. “I realize.” He growled. “Don’t you have something *you* should be doing Private?”

“Yes, yes sir, I do.” He snapped to attention, saluted, performed an about-face and headed back across the living room floor towards the

bedroom. He glanced backwards to stare at the gawking owl while he walked and almost ran into the wall. The owl flashed him a grin as Pugs went back into the bedroom.

Back inside the room, Pugsley looked for something to write on. Kail's Dad always kept a clipboard with a legal pad next to the bed to scribble song ideas on. There was not anything written on the top page, so he sharpened a pencil and sat down to brain-blast some ideas.

“Okay, free flow, free flow.” he muttered to himself. He began to write down some possible titles from details of his dream.

1. The Magnet Planet
2. The Queens Locket
3. The Skillet Hatchet
4. The Dragon Summit
5. Mangy Merit
6. Unicorn Unit

7. The Sinister Senate

That was enough to get started, he thought. Now he needed to write some details of each dream to be able to show Red Monkey. He hoped Kail liked what he had so far.

Pugs was tapping the dull pencil against his forehead when he heard voices outside his window. He looked over and saw Jerry and another squirrel standing on the corner of the roof and they were frantically pointing down towards the ground.



MOGGY



Although he was very focused on his song project, Pugsley couldn't deny he was curious about what Jerry and his partner were looking at. As he got to the window sill, both of the hairy hoarders gestured for him to be quiet.

Pugs gently slid the window open about three inches and looked down through the screen at the empty patch of grass below.

As he surveyed the area, he spied a fluffy gray tail scything the ground like a hockey stick from behind the base of a tree.

Pugsley's heart skipped a beat when the hat wearing grimalkin peered around the trunk at him.

With a knotted throat the pup croaked, "It has to be the cat Owley saw in the bushes."

"What was that Pugsy? Asked Jerry.

"Um, nothing." Pugs replied timidly.

Pugs didn't feel at all like a confident security veteran at that moment. He felt more like a rookie front-liner about to lose his loose lunch. Pugsley was glad the two squirrels were nearby.

Even though he was on the second floor, the gaze of the menacing looking cat sent uncontrollable shivers through Pugsley body.

These slight quivers did not go unnoticed by the cheeky-chompers.

“Hey Baggy Bottom, you’re ain’t gonna faint there are ya?” chittered Jerry’s sidekick.

“Yeah, are you a little scaredy....cat?” tossed in Jerry. At this, both cracked up laughing.

“Good one bro!” said the sidekick gasping for air between his laugh spasms.

Pugsley did not reply to this onslaught of ribbing. His face was even squinched more than usual as he stared downward like a zombie. He felt the unflinching force of the feline’s gaze was somehow drawing him closer.

“Do we need to get a donkey and kick ya in the head, dude?” continued one of the taunters.

The pug wasn’t listening anymore.

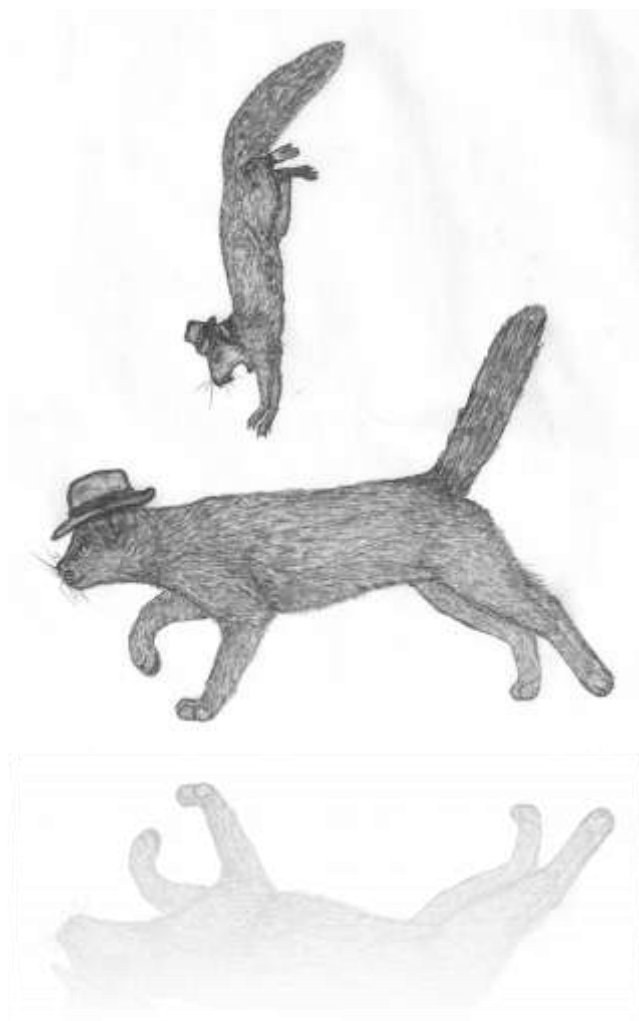
“How ‘bout a genie in a bottle to make that big bad putty-tat go away? A pretty please with a cherry on top, and I’ll let you borrow mine.”

Both of the silly squirrels were hysterically laughing. They were holding their convulsing bellies and rolling around on the roof.

“I’ll bet you fifty bucks he passes out bro!” Jerry howled.

“Honey is anyone home!” putted back the sidekick.

At this last wisecrack, Jerry rolled off the edge of the roof and fell flailing down through the leafless tree. He hit the end of the lowest branch, bounced up and grabbed a small dead branch above him that was barely in reach. He clung with one toe to the twisted twig as it slowly bent until....SNAP!!



CLASH



Ferry struck the frozen ground dome-down. He laid dazed looking back and forth to the tree above and the broken branch he still clenched. His fall must have been replaying in his mind like a broken record.

Pugsley could tell the squirrel's noggin was bogging. It reminded him of a dizzied cartoon character with stars circling his head.

The other mouthy antagonist yelled, “Fratres Ad Finem! (*Brothers to the End* in Latin).”

He dove straight down at the predator puss that slunk towards his fallen comrade.

As Jerry began to untangle and untie his thoughts, he realized the precarious pickle he was in now. He saw his brother-in-arms plummeting from the roof.

Pugs held his breath as the unreal events were about to unfold below him.

Without time to reconsider his decision, the falling nut nibbler stiffened his dagger-sharp claws readying himself for the back attack.

Mr. Meowzers was so focused on his target; he was unaware of the barbed bombardier about to spear his spine.

As the prickly paws of the squirrel touched his back, Mr. Meowzers split-second reflexes made his body recoil like a loaded spring. This reaction caused the collision of the diving defenders' strike to drive deep into the cat's back.

The squirrel had hooked himself into the back of the cat like a bull-rider. As the grimalkin gangster flipped and flopped, the whiskered buckaroo clung on for dear life.

Jerry now had time to unlock his disconnected brain and reconnect it with his body. He was able to climb up the trunk of the tree to watch the rodeo. He did not want to be disloyal to his brother, but he was waiting for his wits to recharge before he joined the fight.

“That’s what you get for causing hate and discontent, you Hairy-Hiney!” Jerry shouted.

Mr. Meowzers looked at Jerry and moved towards the base of the tree. With the other squirrel still clinging to his back, he shot out his claws. He reached the bottom of the tree and started to climb.

“You’re going to pay and then repay for that disrespect, Tree Pest!” the cat oozed with anguish.

The villain’s back began to discolor as the movements up the tree dug the rider’s claws deeper into his kitty coat.

Jerry retreated further up the leafless tree. His pal then unhinged himself and jumped off the cat’s back and onto the ground. This release revealed the wound to Mr. Meowzer’s back. The irritated aggressor looked down at the dismounted passenger and then back up at Jerry

.

From Pugsley's vantage point, he could see the injured feline had had enough.



CAT CROSSING



till clinging to the side of the tree, Mr. Meowzers cried a loud shrill hisser howl. The cry was so woeful that Pugsley started to feel sorry for the injured *Felis Silvestis*, which is Latin for *Wildcat*.

What he did not predict was that the hurtful caterwaul was also a call for help.

“Gary, watch out!” Jerry yelled.

Pugs looked in the direction the goggle-eyed Jerry was pointing. From around the corner of the apartment building emerged a dark misprinted tabby cat. Its coat of hair looked like a patched together quilt. The ominous looking slinker also had armor on its forearm and wore a battle-worn riot helmet. Like a soldier recovering from injuries, he moved cattywampus across the grass.

From behind a vehicle crept a different tail-backer whose head was on a swivel. As he moved towards his target, he carefully explored his surroundings like a jungle guerilla. He was wearing winter issue ACUs (Army Combat Uniform) and a green beret.

Pugsley felt like a weatherman about to forecast a tornado. It was like waiting for a video game

to download. Although agonizingly slow, you hope it is going to blow your mind.

“Get that one on the ground!” yowled Meowzers. “I’ll get this one up here!”

The mad moggy slowly reaffirmed his grip and set his eyes upon Jerry, who was now kitty-corner from him on the tree branch above.

Although it was very apparent that there was a distinct degree of distrust, Pugs could tell the encroaching warriors had definitely worked together before. The practiced foresight of the duo immediately adjusted their angles to the others’ position and circled Gary.

As the circle of cats shrank, the twitching squirrel began to coil like a snake. The cats, anticipating this defense, mirrored the squirrel’s movements and stopped. They slowly bundled themselves waiting for the squirrel to flinch.

One mislaid move would decide the outcome of this standoff.



BOING



The circumstances for Gary were dire; two against one in any fight is unfair. All of the flexed opponents' legs sprung simultaneously. The cats shouted in unison, "Iiii..goooot..iit!!" like outfielders going for a baseball.

Pugsley's jiggly jowled jaw dropped as the endangered squirrel reached the crown of his bound.

Just as Gary was about to be engulfed by the determined hairy hitmen, he shot a glance at the anguished Pug. Gary's expression was not a plea of need, but just a playful grin.

The squirrel raised his right forepaw and looked up. Like the perfect timing of a trapeze act, Jerry dove back down to the end of the branch below him. The tree branch bent like a fishing pole with a swordfish strike. Jerry grabbed Gary's paw and up they went, just out of reach as the cats collided in midair.

The cats struck out at the squirrel that was not there. Their barbed claws missed Gary, but they did snag each other. Not able to unhook in time to land paws down, they crashed to the ground in a pussycat pile.

I bet they are wondering how Gary could have circumvented their twenty craving claws grasping for him, Pugs thought.

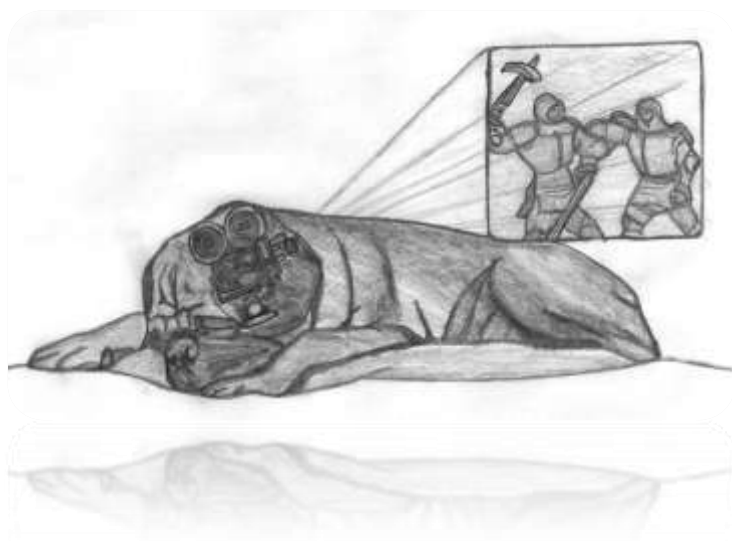
The situation for the squirrels was only semisweet because Mr. Meowzers *was* still in the tree. There was no way the acrobats were going to circumnavigate this issue. Meowzers had climbed up to the bowing branch the rebounding nutcrackers were linked to.

What Pugs didn't realize was that Jerry's rescue was multipurpose. The first was to save Gary but, the second was to launch both of them higher into the branches from the spring back of the limb.

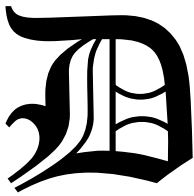
Not only did the squirrels succeed in that multitask, but they also made Mr. Meowzers lose his grip on the narrow branch on which *he* stood. The unprepared cat wobbled, slipped and then toppled through the air landing on his comrades below.

Pugs felt like it was at the semifinals of a semiannual cat and mouse tournament. He

knew this was only the beginning of this feud. Pugsley could visualize a multimillion-dollar business built out of captured moments like these.



A MIND'S EYE



reams occur during the R.E.M. (Rapid Eye Movement) portion of sleep. Pugsley's mind's eye creatively crafted classic adventure tales. In a few of his nighttime narratives, he would insert ragged pieces of historical events. The infields of his dreamscapes were cluttered with nontoxic and mostly nonviolent acts of heroism.

Most of the details were nonstick and hard to remember, but not on this night. This would be a thought thread he would not soon forget.

In most of his dreams, Pugs was always the medieval knight being asked to make right an injustice. The indents in the hilt of his sword were a record of his past nonprofit tasks.

The night of the insane altercation between the squirrels and the cats, his brain bricks built a storyline of the day's events. Although some of the facts were incorrect, the outcome was still the same. Neither side had won, but a war had definitely begun.

For that night's slumber saga, Pugsley stood on a hilltop overlooking a Middle Age battlefield. The two sides, of course, were the squirrels and the cats. The squirrels were dressed in informal combat attire made mostly of layers of leather and cloth. The cats wore

full polished armor that reflected light blasts to the Pug's eyes as the soldiers below fidgeted. Both sides waited for the signal to attack.

The commanders of each formation looked towards Pugsley, who at this point in the dream, now held a long guidon with a red flag on the end. The pup was no longer an inactive participant. He was the one who would start the battle by dropping the flag.

Pugs thought to himself, *Well, this is nonsense. Why me? Who am I supposed to be rooting for? What do I want the outcome to be?*

The reluctant sentinel started to hear music. At first, he heard just drum beats, and then the music increased, both in volume and intensity.

He closed his eyes and inhaled a deep breath and said, "I'm not doing this," and threw down the flag. He was almost knocked over by the

roar of the armies on the valley floor below.
They charged at each other.

What did I do? I didn't mean to.....



ASSEMBLED LINES



ugsley's two worlds, the dream world, and the real world, met on the lines of the yellow notepad he frantically scribbled on that next morning. His mission was to snatch every detail crumb of last night's dream while it was still real fresh in his mind.

Throughout history, there have always been conflicts between warring clans that attempted to control small chunks of earth they wished to call home. Pugsley presumed that was why the cats exhibited so much hostility towards the squirrels.

The history of Great Britain is a good example. Once under the control of the Roman Empire, it is now three countries. There have been a great number of conflicts that led to the borders of England, Scotland, and Wales. There are still current tensions between the dividing lines of Northern Ireland that are a part of the United Kingdom.

Wow, how confusing, Pugs thought. Was the parking lot and small patches of grass in their apartment complex worth fighting or dying over? Squirrels spend most of their time in the trees and cats exist on the ground for the most

*part. Although cats caught in trees is more
than likely a frequent joke in squirrel scurries.*



STUDIO



ugs was very excited for the next music meeting with the monkey.

He had been waiting for Kail to leave out the door for school before he headed to the “studio,” as he liked to refer to it now. Unlike the first time he worked together, he felt a little more prepared. The door was closed, but he could faintly hear the strumming of a guitar and singing.

He knocked quietly on the door, but the music did not stop. He waited for a few seconds, and then he knocked harder. This time the music did stop, the door swung open, and Pugs came face to face with a mad monkey.

“Can’t you read, twerp!” puffed the stuffed simian.

“What...what do you mean?” replied the baffled pup.

The now not so good-natured monkey pumped his pointed finger up. Pugsley looked up and saw a lit sign that read “Recording In Progress.”

“Don’t disrespect the sign! This is my private time to create. I have been trying to get that song recorded for the last hour. I almost got that take too.” Glared the babbling baboon.

“I’m sorry Red Monkey. I was just so excited to show you what I’ve got. I didn’t even think to look up.” Pugs thought, *Wow, musicians are moody.*

Red Monkey just stared at Pugs for a moment and then hung his head.

“My bad, sorry I went off on you like that. I was just in a sweet spot where things were flowing, and interruptions fire me off. I need to collar that attitude.” Said the apologetic ape with a half grin.

“No problem. I’ll make sure to check the sign next time, I promise. Do you want me to leave you alone? You know, let you finish?” Pugs asked.

“Nah, I’ll go after it another time. I am out of the zone now. Come on in.” Monkey said as he turned into the room.

“No beats this morning?” asked the pup.

“Nah, when it’s raining, it feels mellower.”
Monkey motioned towards the window.

Pugsley had not even noticed that it was raining out. It is probably the reason why he had not gotten any annoying visitors this morning.

“So, just a little acoustic guitar and vocals. Some days it’s just plinking.” The monkey rambled as he put away his guitar.

“Plinking?” asked Pugsley.

“Yeah, like random note-drops falling from the guitar strings.” Red Monkey replied as he positioned himself in front of the laptop.

“I would really love to hear some of those recordings sometime,” Pugsley said.

“Sure. Okay, what have ya got?” the monkey reached for the papers Pugs held.

Pugsley passed the papers to the monkey and inquired. “Red Monkey have you ever seen peculiar looking animals outside?”

“Yeah, it’s quite a circus out there. The world is full of crazy characters, my friend. That’s what makes it interesting.”

“Do any of them pester you? Like knocking on the windows and stuff?” the pup complained.

“A squirrel tried that one time, but never did it again,” declared the monkey.

“Really, how did you stop him?” Pugs appealed.

“Well, you saw just a few minutes ago that I have kind of a temper. I also move through trees quickly, especially when I’m mad. So I

jumped out the window and chased this one squirrel named, Barry I think.”

“Jerry?” Pugs interjected.

“Yeah, that’s him. Anyway, I autographed him and told him if he bugs me again, I will have no mercy.” said Red Monkey.

“Autographed him? What’s that?” Pugs asked.

The monkey said with a smirk, “Well, it’s hard to tell squirrels apart, so...”

Pugs interrupted, “But Jerry wears a WW2 pilot hat.”

“He does now because I ripped a tuft of hair off his head. He has a bald spot there now. So, he stays clear of my side of the building.”

“What about cats?” Pressed Pugs.

“Cats? Cats can’t get up here.” Replied the monkey

“No, I mean have you seen them around?” Pugsley asked.

“Oh yeah, once in a while. They don’t bother me none though. So, what have we got here?” Red Monkey started to read the papers Pugs had handed him.



READY, SET...WHOA!



ugsley was roused by the sounds of hustle and bustle outside the window. He jumped out of bed and moved to the window sill. The tree next to the building was filled with squirrels. Most of the activity was below him at the level of the tree where the branches were closest to the ground.

The frantic workers were constructing a structure in the shape of an umbrella that encircled the trunk. At this point in the build it was like the poles of a teepee without the buffalo hide covering on it yet.

In the middle boughs, a crew was weaving mesh baskets close to the trunk. A few of the finished baskets were being loaded with nutshells.

On the ground below the builders was a tiny dog. It was about the same size as Pugsley, but much scrawnier. He was ushering squirrels through a small gap at the bottom of the six-foot privacy fence that separated the apartment complex from the neighborhood next door.

From his viewpoint, Pugsley could see over the fence. The pint-sized portal gave direct access to a raised garden bed common area on

the other side of the fence. The dormant plot of ground was covered in gravel.

Back and forth the squirrels would go with cheeks full of pebbles and scamper up the back side of the tree and spit them out in one of the finished baskets.

Pugs saw Jerry and Gary working with a crew at the bottom section of the tree. He wanted to warn them about the dog, so he opened the window.

Pugsley hollered, “Hey you guys there’s a dog down there!”

All the squirrels froze in place which was a strange sight from where Pugsley sat. The whole tree went from appearing like it was alive to a shuddering stop.

Jerry broke the silence with, “Yeah, we know. That’s Walter. He’s with us.”

The squirrels all started chittering to each other in hushed tones.

“It’s alright everybody, that’s just Pugsley. He’s kinda uptight, but he’s alright.” Jerry affirmed.

“Back at it everyone,” a strangely dressed cat commanded from a broad branch just above the tree skirt project.

The tree jolted awake again with movement, especially the top half of the bare branches. There were umpteen smaller squirrels hanging streamers and banners of all sizes and colors.

Puglsey thought maybe they were making a winter storage area until he saw the slingshots.



WAR FAIR



hy don't you come down and give us a hand, instead of just staring? At the very least you could backup Walter there on security." Jerry yelled up at Pugsley.

"I don't need any help," yapped Walter. "I am not scared of those scraggly cats. Let them come." Walt strutted around the base of the tree like he was a bulldog.

“What are you building down there anyway?”
asked the Pug.

“Give me a minute. I’ll be right up and explain. We may need a favor from you, unless you’re on the kitty’s side.” Jerry paused for an answer; so did the rest of the tree.

“Well, I didn’t know I had to pick a side.”
Pugs answered hesitantly.

The tree of fuzzy faces still waited for an answer from the now pressured Pug.

“No, I guess I’m not on their side,” replied
Pugsley.

A collective sigh of relief came from the tree,
and again the tree came alive.

Jerry told his coworkers. “I’ll be right back.”

He quickly ascended up through the branches until he was at the bough that extended closest to Pugs.

“Alright, here’s the lowdown. After the dust-up we had the other day with those clowns, Brassbeard down there...

“The cat with the tools?” Pugs interrupted.

“Yeah, anyway he heard some scuttlebutt about a grimalkin gathering. I guess the cats we humiliated are a part of some organization. I guess this “Kitty Club” thinks they control this area. Mafioso type stuff.”

“Why is *that* cat there in the tree helping you guys?” asked the puzzled Pug.

“Well, old Brassbeard there has had to pay a protection fee to those other cats to keep this small patch of neighborhood. We all get along

with him. He is always willing to help if we have an issue building our dreys.”

“Dreys? What’s that? Pugsley butted in.

“Dude, it’s amazing what you don’t know. Dreys, you know, our homes, cribs, towers on high.” Jerry answered irked.

“Nests?” Pugs said.

“No, not nests! We’re not birds! Don’t ever say nests to a squirrel, man, unless you want a scrap on your hands.” Jerry huffed.

“My bad, bro, I didn’t know.” Pugs sorrowfully said.

“In any case, we are getting ready for a little war and then a party up top.” Jerry pointed to the decorated crown of the tree.

“Wow. You said you needed a favor?” Pugs asked.

“Oh, yeah. We have been searching the trash bins all around the neighborhood for an air pump of some kind. You wouldn’t be able to get your hands on one would you?”

“For what?” the puzzled pooch asked.

“Well, if the cats aren’t going to play fair, we aren’t either. Brassbeard wants to make a nut canon. We found the perfect size pipe, but we need a pump to pressurize it.”

“Like a bicycle pump or soccer ball pump, how big?” asked Pugs.

“Good question. Hey, Brassbeard!” Jerry shouted down to the cat. “What kind of pump do you need for the canon?!”

“What do you have? I can make most anything work,” replied the tool laden tomcat from the branch below.



SANTA SAPPY



ell, I better get back at it.

Daylight's 'aburning buddy."

Jerry said as he spun around

on the branch to leave. An approaching yell rang out from out of nowhere that sounded like, "Go, go, go!" The shout was not coming from the tree or the ground though. Whatever it was repeated, "Go, go, go!" as it got closer.

The squirrels reacted as though it was an alarm bell being rung. They all stopped what they were doing and scrambled up to the highest branches.

From over the top of the building, straight down past Jerry, a bird with a sack in his beak landed near one of the woven baskets in the middle of the tree and dropped the sack in it.

“Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas!” The bird belted out.

Pugsley realized it was Sappy. The bird looked up at all the squirrels huddled at the top of the leafless tree.

“Hey guys, it’s me, Santa Sappy! I come bearing gifts,” beamed the bouncy bird. He spread his wings presenting the gifts he had dropped in the basket.

Pugsley realized he was not the only one who knew the wacky woodpecker. When the squirrels realized who the bird was, they moved back down the tree and resumed their tasks.

Brassbeard, who had not been frightened at all, moved up to the basket level of the tree. Pugs could see that Sappy was uneasy around the well-armored cat and backed away from the basket to give the cat some space.

“CO2 cartridges? That’s perfect. Where did you come across these?” nodded the impressed kitty craftsman.

“I have my connections, Captain Cat. Glad I could help,” replied the proud Picidae (Woodpecker).

Sappy’s skittish scanning caught sight of Pugsley in the window. He darted up to his usual spot on the eave overhang.



EMBARCK



ell, fuzzy bottom, tell me,
are ya a-tingle, giddy,
stoked, chomping at the
bit...”

Pugsley chopped Sappy’s jabber off. “Ready
to do what?

“Be involved in an adventure, of course. You
are about to have one right outside your front
door,” replied the perplexed bird.

“I never agreed to something like this, no way. I’m not involved,” the pup said shaking his head.

“Here’s your opportunity to be involved! It will require you to perform an act of blind faith.” The bird whispered theatrically. “You will break free of your cage and live a little!” Sappy said with vibrato, his vocal volume rising and falling like a circus ringmaster.

He continued, “You climb the summit of your fears with furious gusto! Engulf yourself in an armor of courage with no despair of what might be. Sink your teeth into your quest with....”

Pugsley broke in again, “Yeah, the cats could sink their teeth into me and yank the stuffing out.”

“Are you going to race towards this challenge to overcome your fear?” Sappy continued in his

dramatic voice, gesturing forward, his wing outstretched like a Civil War general leading a charge.

Sappy purposely paused and slowly looked down at Pugs, “Or trudge your saggy bottom at your normal pokey plod and never do anything?”

The woodpecker was on a roll, “Will you take the righteous straight line to danger or the indirect cowardly creep? We will never know what you are capable of until you get your booty moving out the door and on our way. You don’t have a freckle of a chance to accomplish anything until then,” he said with his wing on his hips.

“What’s it gonna be? Are you in or out?” Sappy waited impatiently.



WHAT'S NEXT?



hen Kail returned home that afternoon, Pugsley was still observing the preparations outside the window.

By this time the crew at the base of the tree had finished the skirting shield that kept the cats from climbing the tree. All of the baskets were either full of pebbles or nuts.

Walter had gone under the fence and back to his house next door. Sappy had flown off on another urgent errand for Brassbeard, and the festivities at the top of the tree were in full swing.

Kail walked into the room and stood behind the Pug looking out the window.

“Holy cow, that’s amazing. They have done a lot of work on that tree fort today. I guess that’s what it is.” Kail marveled.

“Yeah, they are going to battle the cats,” Pugsley confirmed.

“Man, it seems like those guys are always irritating each other.” Kail remarked.

The pup turned and looked up at Kail. “What do you mean? Jerry said this was about territory.”

“Who’s Jerry?” asked Kail.

“He’s the squirrel that kept me from sleeping and made me lose my job.” The Pug replied remorsefully.

“Oh, really, I didn’t know that part. See, that’s what I’m talking about. I’ve seen those squirrels purposefully taunting the cats. Now, they’re going to battle over squirrel *territory*?” Kail said.

“Not squirrel territory, cat territory for Brassbeard.” Pugs clarified.

“Now, there’s a good song title. Who’s he?” Kail quizzed.

Pugs spent the rest of the afternoon telling Kail everything he had learned that day. They spent the evening until it got dark watching the celebration in the tree.

*This is the life, Pug's thought. Music to write,
battles to watch, dreams to come true. He
couldn't wait for more adventures to come.*



Thank you for reading!